

Testimony of Dr. Kathleen M. Ouellette,
Superintendent of Schools, Waterbury, CT
February, 2015

In Reference To:

**House Bill 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget for the Biennium Ending
June Thirtieth 2017 and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions
Related to Revenue**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee,
I am offering testimony in my capacity of Superintendent of Schools, for the
Waterbury Public School District.

The Waterbury Public School District, with its 28 schools and more than 18,000 students, is grateful for the increases in State financial support for public education recommended by Governor Malloy, and approved by the legislature in the last three years. During that time Waterbury students have benefited greatly from increases in ECS funding, from the district's designation as an Alliance District and receipt of Alliance District grants, from support for two of Waterbury's schools as Commissioner's Network Schools, and from several other education funding initiatives included in recent State budgets.

Today, on behalf of Waterbury Public Schools, I am here to advocate for increased funding to districts through the ECS Grant, to advocate for both increased Alliance District funding and greater flexibility with those funds, and to speak against decreasing funding for Network Schools and for Priority Schools Extended School Hours and Summer Programs, all in the next State budget.

Educational Cost Sharing, or ECS funding is the primary source of State support for general education costs. Flat funding for ECS for next year, as has been proposed, would return school districts to the unfortunate position of struggling to even maintain current levels of programming. Such was the situation during the four years of flat funding from the State immediately prior to the ECS increases of the past three years. Urban districts like Waterbury, with large numbers of residents living at or below the poverty level, are least able to absorb a shift in education costs from the State to the local level. And, according to the CT Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission, many communities are significantly underfunded based on their ECS target amount. The most underfunded, on a dollar basis, was Waterbury receiving \$47,443,115 less than its ECS target amount in 2014-15. (CT Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission ECS Memorandum, Jan. 21, 2015) According to the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, it would take a 3% increase in ECS funding just to meet the increased costs of maintaining present public education programs statewide for the next school year. Increasing ECS funding would increase support for educational programs

statewide, positively impacting all of Connecticut's youth. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to increase ECS funding to districts in the next State budget.

Recent Alliance District funding represents a significant State investment in lower-performing school districts, including Waterbury. Using **Alliance District funds**, Waterbury has implemented a Central Office Transformation design that provides unprecedented support for instructional leaders—preparing and sustaining principals as they dedicate themselves to assuring that all teachers are employing effective teaching strategies, techniques, and practices, to improve student learning. This kind of systemic reform work is at the heart of what urban districts like Waterbury must do if we are to prepare our youth to be contributing members of our workforce and our democracy.

This work in Waterbury could be both advanced and hastened with increased annual Alliance District grants in the next two-year State budget. Moreover, these kinds of school improvement efforts would be greatly enhanced by affording the district greater flexibility with the use of Alliance grant funds. I urge you to consider granting local boards of education and superintendents more latitude in that regard.

Now, just over two and a half years into sweeping district reform and the transformation process described, Waterbury, with the support of the Governor

and the State of Connecticut, is beginning to see the schools turn the curve toward improving student outcomes. At this time when it is crucial to sustain and intensify our efforts, we request that the State augment its financial commitment to this process, and relax some Alliance spending restrictions. It is our expectation that with such increased State support and flexibility that Waterbury will continue on the pathway to realizing historic student gains.

Waterbury's two **Commissioner's Network Schools**, or Turnaround Schools, include one elementary school and one high school. With support for these schools from the State, school-based reform on a very large-scale has begun. Teams of administrators, teachers, parents, community members, union representatives, and district-level leaders have developed Turnaround Plans that have the potential to change our lowest-performing schools into centers of academic excellence. These plans have been approved by the State and require sustained financial investment by the State. For these reasons, I ask you not to decrease funding for the Network Schools, but rather to reinstate Network Schools funding at least to its current level.

Finally, **Priority School Extended School Hours and Summer Programs** are especially important for Waterbury students. As a Priority School District, Waterbury has been appreciative of these funds to provide students with out-of-school time programs. While research shows that extended school day and

summer programs benefit students generally, our experience tells us that Waterbury students especially need those kinds of opportunities for academic reinforcement, educational enrichment, and recreation. For this reason, I request that you reinstate funding in the FY 2015 budget for the Priority School Extended School Hours and Summer Programs.

In Waterbury we believe that today's students are tomorrow's leaders! **All** of our students need and deserve your support for sustained and increased State funding to promote their academic success, and their preparedness for college and the world of work. On behalf of Waterbury's youngest citizens, I ask you to champion that cause and to that end, I implore you to work toward securing the budget changes detailed in my testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding the State Budget.